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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 KINSHASA 000350

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"BRAZZA-IN-BRIEF" MONTHLY ISSUES REPORT

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Classified By: Charge d'affaires, a.i., Mark J. Biedlingmaier

SASSOU-NGUESSO: Travel, Triumphs and Treason?

[1](#). (C) President Denis Sassou-Nguesso continued his shuttle diplomacy in February with visits to Tripoli, Libreville, Kinshasa and Paris to solidify his well-publicized image as the man of "peace and reconciliation" following election as Chairman of the African Union in late January. In turn, he welcomed Prime Minister Charles Konan Banny to Brazzaville to mediate the impasse over creating a national unity government and scheduling elections for Ivory Coast by 2006. Shortly thereafter, Sassou-Nguesso hosted King Mohammed VI of Morocco for a two-day State Visit which included a lavish sit-down dinner for 900 guests in an air-conditioned tent on the grounds of the Palais du Peuple. The King inaugurated a nationwide vaccination campaign against early childhood diseases and offered sizeable grants on technical and commercial cooperation, but apparently left the Republic of Congo without a firm commitment from Morocco (as reportedly requested by Sassou) to join the African Union, reversing King Hassan II's decision to withdraw from its predecessor body, the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Sassou-Nguesso invited the diplomatic corps and all ministry officials to a rather self-serving "congratulatory cocktail" on February 8 to receive well wishes from the community, and used this opportunity to buttonhole selected embassies for assistance on a variety of issues. He asked that the United States be more vocal in its support for approval of IMF Decision Point debt relief for the Congo, schedule a White House Oval Office visit at the earliest opportunity for him to elaborate on AU issues and agenda with President Bush, and, to attract interest from a major U.S. chain to build a luxury hotel and convention center in Brazzaville so that he could be "not the nation's innkeeper, but rather, the African region's innkeeper" to high-level delegations and dignitaries.

[2](#). (C) One of Sassou-Nguesso's wishes was granted on February 24 following a consensus agreement by the World Bank Board and Managing Directors to approve HIPC (Highly-Indebted Poor Countries) debt relief for the Congo. The IMF Board is expected to ratify the proposal at its meeting on March 3, which includes annual review of triggers

pertaining to sustained good governance, poverty growth reduction facilitation, and financial audits conducted in accordance with international standards. In a meeting with Finance Minister Pacifique Issiobeka on February 26, Charge d'affaires reviewed key elements of the agreement and noted that "the ball was squarely in Congo's court" following this long march toward Completion Point, and after trying to refocus world attention on the basic needs of the Congolese people following the highly-critical Global Witness report and devastating editorials in the London Times, Wall Street Journal and other international press. Sassou-Nguesso apparently instructed Issiobeka to relay his sincerest appreciation for Department and embassy support on the successful outcome, and said he considers the United States a "true friend of Congo." The following day at the routine airport departure ceremony for the President's February 27 - March 4 trip to Paris, news circulated quickly among the diplomatic corps representatives of the heroic efforts by President Jacques Chirac to secure debt relief for the Congo, this following a call he purportedly made to the White House to insist that President Bush put World Bank President Wolfowitz "in-line" and to demand a positive vote by the U.S. Thus, the question remains Mr. Sassou, "true friend" of George or Jacques?

13. (C) Having recently retained the services of legal titans Plato Cacheris, Michael Ledeen and John Richards (Trout-Cacheris, PLLC, Washington, DC) to sort through the Kensington, Sphynx-Berumda, Walker International and other vulture fund court-case decisions rendered by the Royal Court of London in 2005, President Sassou-Nguesso should be well equipped to handle the charge of high treason leveled by Mr. Joseph Kignoumbi Kia Mboundou. Mr. Mboundou, representative of the UPADS (Pan-African Union for Social Democracy), published a well-documented, four-page letter to the

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President of Parliament detailing alleged violation of President Sassou-Nguesso's duty to respect and defend the Constitution, to protect the public well being, and, to develop the nation and its natural resources. He cited Articles 38, 39 and 47 of the Constitution of 20 January 2002 and condemned Sassou for "crimes of high treason", "acts of corruption and illicit enrichment leading to the dilapidation of public services", and, "indiscriminate pillaging" punishable under the law. Charge d'affaires met with Mr. Cacheris and his team (upon instruction from their new client) to assess the state of play from the embassy's perspective. Now that debt relief seems assured from IMF/World Bank, it is anticipated that Cacheris will seek to negotiate an out-of-court settlement with the vulture fund creditors. As for Mr. Mboundou and the charge of high treason? Odds are, if Mr. Cacheris could successfully defend Monica Lewinsky, the rehabilitation of Denis Sassou-Nguesso should soon follow. Mr. Mboundou, rest your case.

WHEELS OF DEMOCRACY CHURN FORWARD

14. (U) Following the widely-publicized celebratory event in Kinshasa on February 4 to promulgate the new Democratic Republic of Congo Constitution and Spring electoral process, attention in Brazzaville has turned toward the 2007 legislative and 2009 presidential campaigns for the Republic of Congo. MONUC, and in particular, former Ambassador Bill Swing, have received high marks for their deft management of the voter registration process, campaign monitoring and election-day poll observer activities. Various academics, prominent journalists, civil society representatives and NGOs have expressed hope that the international community will offer similar support, oversight and mentoring to the ROC as well as it prepares for 2007 and 2009. Mr. Bayi Sinibaguy-Mollet, the National Coordinator of CEPAREC (Center for Partnership Exchange, Support and Reinforcement of

Capacity), made a compelling presentation to the embassy for support to implement a multi-region, USD \$450,000 program of workshops, seminars, community awareness and involvement projects to inform and educate the voting public. NDI (National Democratic Institute) sponsored workshops in December 2005 and January 2006, attended by over 300 representatives from civil society groups, opposition parties, and NGOs under the chairmanship of host-government Minister of the Interior and Decentralization, Francois Ibovi. The central themes of these events were "Collaboration Among Political Parties," and "Rules and Responsibility of Political Parties: Commitment to Good Governance." Post would appreciate guidance, and ideally, temporary duty support assistance, to work with CEPAREC, NDI, International Republic Institute (IRI), or the International Foundation for Election Strengthening (IFES) to capture and maintain the momentum and interest generated in the electoral process and surfacing at the grass-roots level.

15. (U) Related to the above, the Swedish Foundation for Human Rights held a conference this month on the "Harmonization of National Laws with International Treaties," a follow-on to the Foundation's well received February 2004 "Conference on the Evaluation and Perspectives of the Congolese Civil Society in the Reinforcement of Peace, Democracy and Human Rights." The embassy participated in the February 8 kick-off of the PNDDR (National Program on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reinsertion of Combatants), and Steering Committee meeting on February 25 that featured a very candid and informative presentation by Belgian Central African Affairs expert, Ms. Sophie da Camara. UNDP has invited the embassy to become more actively engaged on this issue, and to join the Embassy of South Africa and UNDP in plans to strengthen regional cooperation on containment of small arms/light weapons and related disarmament issues. This partnership was raised during the recent visit to Brazzaville by Col. Kelly Langdorf, regional director for Central Africa, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs, however, further guidance on possible next steps is required from the Department of Defense and Department of State in order to proceed in an informed fashion.

16. (C) In response to President Sassou-Nguesso's comments in Khartoum to Secretary Rice that the United States military had "neglected" Congo in recent years, post is pleased to

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report that arrangements for the March 21-25 USN Emery Land ship visit to Pointe Noire and ship rider program offered to host-government naval officers are proceeding full-speed ahead. Post has been advised by Presidency Secretary General, Ambassador Daniel Owessa, that Sassou plans to attend either the VIP dinner aboard ship, tentatively scheduled for March 24, and perhaps a larger event hosted for the American expat and diplomatic communities earlier in the week. On a slightly smaller scale, "Facing the Congo" author Jeffrey Tayler has completed approximately two-thirds of his river voyage via dugout pirogue from Impfondo to the port of Brazzaville. Extensive media coverage is planned for his anticipated arrival on March 15, and the Office of the Presidency will schedule a photo-op with Sassou-Nguesso to mark successful completion of this historic journey. Tayler will publish an article for Men's Journal and perhaps another book, which no doubt could bring favorable world attention to the Republic of Congo.

IN THE LOOP - BRAZZAVILLE EDITION

17. (U) Cons/Econ Officer responded to complaints filed by an American firm, Intervision Foods of Atlanta, Georgia, and the U.S. Poultry and Egg Export Council, after the Minister

of Commerce, Adelaide Moundele-Ngolo, announced plans on February 22 for a complete ban on the importation of poultry and poultry products to the Republic of Congo, including those from the United States. The matter was demarched to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Commerce and Office of the Presidency, however, senior Republic of Congo officials stated that they could not "discriminate in favor" of the United States although they understood Avian Flu and the H5N1 virus had not yet been detected in the continental United States. Later that day, the Ministry of Commerce released a statement noting that waivers to this policy may be requested and would be reviewed on a case-by-case, country-by-country basis.

18. (U) In response to President Sassou-Nguesso's wishes to have Republic of Congo serve as the "region's innkeeper" (see para 1), Brazzaville will serve as the venue for several international conferences in the near future, to include: the "Continental Consultative Committee Meeting on Universal Access to Prevention, Treatment, Care and Support" (March 6-8); the "First African Union Conference for Ministers in Charge of Railway Transport" (April 10-14); and in late May, the Central African Ministers Conference on Protection of the Environment. To level the playing field, an official delegation headed by the Mayor of Brazzaville, Hugues Ngouelondele (son-in-law of the President), traveled to Washington, D.C., February 7-15, to attend the "United Cities and Local Governments Conference." It was subsequently announced that the mayors of Brazzaville and Washington, D.C. had signed a cooperative agreement on February 10 to establish a "Sister-City Relationship" between capitals. Plans for celebrations of "Brazzaville Week in D.C." and "D.C. Week in Brazzaville" to promote local services, culture and products are underway.

19. (U) An Office of Foreign Missions advisory team will arrive in Brazzaville March 1 to settle outstanding tax exoneration and VAT issues with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Finance to clear way for the Brazzaville NEC contractor bid conference in early May and project ground-breaking anticipated by early Fall 2006. In the meantime, FSN MGT section staff currently assigned to the Joint Administrative Office in Kinshasa will transition to an interim office site at the BDEAC Bank building in Brazzaville upon completion of DS-mandated security upgrades and VSAT installation within the next 3 months. This move will significantly improve embassy management operations and our ability to report effectively on developments in the Republic of Congo, not to mention considerable cost savings to the USG. A long-term lease for the Chief of Mission residence (CMR) was signed with the Minister of Construction on February 22, following protracted negotiations, and the property was recently surveyed by an OBO/IF design team to plan for Embassy Brazzaville's first official CMR since the 1997 ordered evacuation of post at the onset of Congo's civil war.

110. (U) We are also pleased to announce that FSO Robert
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Weisberg received full Senate confirmation of his nomination as Ambassador to the Republic of Congo on February 10 and will be arriving in Brazzaville to lead his Country Team by late April.

111. (U) And in case you were wondering - yes, construction of the Savoran da Brazza mausoleum continues as its glacial place. The saga has taken yet another peculiar twist with word that President Sassou-Nguesso, during a private visit with the Dali Lama late last year, was advised that his time (power) in office would soon come to an end, unless Sassou, a Freemason, could retrieve secret documents safeguarded by an indigenous tribe to inter with da Brazza's mortal remains. To date, emissaries sent to collect these mystical documents have been repeatedly thwarted in their attempts. Watch this

space.

¶12. (U) Embassy Brazzaville Office.
DOUGHERTY